

April 10, 2019

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Dear Legislators:

On behalf of the members of the Florida Agriculture Coalition, we would like to request your support of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's (FDACS) budget and want to highlight several of their budget items that are extremely important to Florida's farm and ranch families.

Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign, better known as "Fresh from Florida": The programs funded are key factors in the continued economic viability of Florida's farmers. It is also critically beneficial for Florida consumers by educating the public on local and healthy food choices. It is also a great investment for the State with a \$22 return on investment for every \$1 spent on the program. Cuts to this program will set back by years Florida's farmers efforts in holding and expanding markets to sell their Florida produced commodities.

Water Quality and Nutrient Reduction Programs: The public and policy makers are more focused than ever on making sure we make improvements to water quality. We are in total agreement and have been and want to be a continued partner in that effort. The FDACS Office of Agriculture Water Policy has the programs, people and proven partnerships with the farming community to accomplish this task but it requires adequate funding to be successful. The farmers and ranchers located in critical areas of concern from the spring watersheds in the North to the Lake Okeechobee watershed in the South, are positioned to partner with the State on BMPs and innovative technologies to further reduce nutrient loadings and to conserve water. With the full funding of these programs, you will be guaranteeing the fastest and most cost-effective path to the water quality improvements we all want. We urge you to provide funding for agricultural restoration projects both within the Lake Okeechobee watershed and statewide.

Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP): Every day acres of farm and ranch land are lost to development as part of Florida's robust economy. Many of these acres could have been protected if programs like RFLPP were adequately funded. This program allows for farm and ranch families to sell their development rights to the State and keep the property on tax rolls and in green space that allows for wildlife habitat, water quality improvements and water recharge. The reality is FDACS's request for this very popular program doesn't come close to meet the demand, with 140 landowners eager to participate if only there was enough funding. That is why it is so critical to fund their request and commit to future increases in funding for this program because anything short of that amount means the State in many cases will lose forever critical parcels to development.

The programs and services provided to Florida agriculture and consumers by FDACS are critically important and the above three budget areas are just a few of the ways that all of Florida's citizens benefit from a fully funded FDACS. We know policy makers have to be financially prudent of Florida's taxpayer funds, but we can assure you there is no better use of said funds than ensuring a robust local source of safe and affordable food with as little impact to the environment as possible. We appreciate your consideration of our request and appreciate your service to the State of Florida.

Sincerely,



Ray Hodge, Chairman

Florida Agriculture Coalition

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